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THE PRESENT MADE FUTURE: KARL RAHNER'S ESCHATOLOGICAL DEBT TO HEIDEGGER

Nicholas Adams

It is well-known that Karl Rahner studied with Heidegger, but although there has been some recent interest in Rahner's eschatology, it is rarely recognised how substantially Rahner's discussion of the future draws on Heidegger's earlier writings on time. At the same time, it is increasingly desirable to show how technical issues in theology bear upon concrete political practice in the public sphere. This article shows the extent of Rahner's use of Heidegger and explains how Rahner's understanding of the future relates to concrete questions of ethics and Christian self-understanding.

Eschatology forms a central part of Karl Rahner's mature theology. For Rahner the future, understood as God's future for humankind, is an integral part of how Christians describe the present. Rahner partially blurs the temporal boundaries between present and future in order to describe political issues associated with planning and the relationship between how the kingdom of God is pictured and the political practices that it informs. For this reason, Rahner's eschatology offers an excellent example of the way a technical discussion in systematic theology informs profoundly practical issues in the public sphere. This article offers a sketch of what Rahner seems to have meant by the future together with a demonstration of its connection to issues of planning and other politically oriented modes of reasoning.

It is worth noting at the outset that one of the commonly encountered problems in presenting Rahner's work is his practice of referring to secondary sources or direct influences only very rarely. It is thus sometimes difficult to decide which kinds of debate provide an appropriate context within which to evaluate his own opinions and judgements. The questions addressed here are illuminated most clearly when discussed in the context of the work of Martin Heidegger. Rahner's own view of time, for example, becomes clearly illuminated when contrasted to what Heidegger says of the future in his own early work.

Rahner's contribution to questions of eschatology in the 1960s and 1970s largely turns on the difference between specifically Christian understandings of the future – the future of creation attested in Scripture and in particular forms of worship – and secular approaches, be they loosely pragmatic or more strictly Marxist.¹ The main categories which frame Rahner's position are those of "mystery" and the "absolute future" as something constitutive of what it is to be human. Heidegger's influence on Rahner makes an



engagement with Heidegger's view of the future in *Being and Time* of 1927 unavoidable. What makes Rahner's relationship to Heidegger particularly interesting is his reliance on a philosophy which, like Marx's, understood itself as overtly and uncompromisingly untheological.² This is perhaps something of a liability for a theologian who seeks to articulate a distinctly *Christian* view, not least because Rahner nowhere explicitly articulates his disagreements with, or divergences from, Heidegger. Consequently some of Rahner's work runs the risk of offering only a commentary on the differences between views of the "future" in Heidegger and those in Marx, siding largely as Rahner does with Heidegger. Unlike the case of the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann, whose relationship and frequent meetings with Heidegger are well documented, Rahner's own dependence on Heidegger is difficult to describe at all confidently: Rahner himself does not explicitly describe how he uses Heidegger's anti-"metaphysical" philosophical project. Despite these difficulties, and given Heidegger's own problematic and difficult relationship to questions of political practice in the public sphere, this issue cannot be avoided if one wishes to take seriously the usefulness of Rahner's eschatology for contemporary Christian practice.

Absolute Future and the Extended Present

The task Rahner sets himself in his essay "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions" can be given a simple *précis*: how should statements about the future found in scripture best be understood, particularly in the light of culturally predominant current understandings of time which largely describe time as a linear succession of events? His answer can also be given relatively plainly: eschatological assertions made before the modern period presuppose a radically different understanding of time, which incorporate an altogether richer understanding of the freedom and Grace that must (for Christians) accompany understandings of worldly causality.³ Drawing upon a largely Heideggerian lexicon, it is Rahner's intention to challenge what might be called positivist interpretations of scriptural texts (which exercise a hermeneutic more appropriate to interpreting a weather report) and at the same time demonstrate the kinds of political responsibility that follow from a deeper understanding of scriptural assertions about God's future.

If eschatological assertions are not like weather reports (or press reports in advance) how should we best understand them? Rahner distinguishes between apocalyptic and eschatology:

whenever there is speech [in Christian theology] about the future whose intended content is the anticipated report of a spectator concerning a coming event, there is a false apocalyptic (Rahner IV, 410 [330]).⁴

Echoing Kierkegaard's remarks about faith in *Fear and Trembling*, Rahner suggests that apocalyptic, wrongly understood, reduces the future merely to a "distantly outstanding object (*abständig Ausständige*).\" (IV, 408 [329])⁵ By contrast

Eschatology is therefore not an anticipated report of events to follow later on ... but the necessary forward-looking glance for the person in his or her spiritual decision in its dual aspects of freedom and faith. ... This looks toward the completion of an already eschatological situation (IV, 414-5 [334]).

Rahner dismisses what he calls "metaphysical doctrine" and privileges the notion of "decision", which strongly suggests the influence of Heidegger's earlier work. This deserves some examination, as it will become clear that Rahner's understanding of eschatology as discourse about that which is "futurally present (*künftiges Anwesende*)" (IV, 408 [329]) derives with very little alteration from those sections in *Being and Time* on the temporality of *Dasein*. Such an existential framework for understanding eschatological assertions always presupposes that the "future" presented in biblical accounts exercises a practical claim. Eschatology is thus, for Rahner, speech about a future which pragmatically shapes human self-understanding:

Man holds himself, directs himself, understands himself, in and by retaining his past anamnetically, and by being prognostically present to the outstanding future (IV, 411 [331]).

This use of prognosis has almost nothing to do with what has come to be known as futurology, which presupposes that the human agent is little more than a spectator (as in meteorology or "balanced" journalism), but rather insists that the prognostic self is herself unavoidably engaged in a practical grasp of what is to come. What this might mean will emerge in the later discussion. In such a realm, the subject has no perspective outside the temporal chain of events:

knowledge of the future, in so far as it is still outstanding, is an inner moment of the self-understanding of man in his presence – and it *comes out of it* (IV, 411 [331]).

Two important factors follow from this. Firstly, eschatology is better understood as the "futurity of the present"; secondly this futurity is to some extent an "incalculable, uncontrollable force," which is to say that it encompasses freedom at a level which confounds the limited self-knowledge of the individual subject. By the "futurity of the present" Rahner seems to mean something like this: if someone has a particular self-understanding (as a Christian, for example) then this implies a participation in a constellation of social aspirations and roles which help shape concrete judgements, and these in turn imply a future. A strictly pragmatic version of this insight might be that a builder's self-understanding, at any stage of construction, implies having built a house. A more complicated theological version might be that a Christian's self-understanding, at any stage of cultural formation, implies God's redemption of creation in Christ. The important difference between being a builder and being a Christian is that while a builder's practical horizons can be articulated quite definitely ("house"), a

Christian's horizons unavoidably transcend any particular achievement. This is because the redemption of creation is, from our limited human perspective, indeterminate and unknowable. For this reason, Rahner insists that a fundamental feature of eschatology is its confrontation of the future's unassailable "mystery" and its unsayable absoluteness. A Christian builder, for example, may build a house but her house will never have fully embodied the redemption of creation, even if it participates in that redemption through being a house in which God is rightly worshipped. Eschatologically, the future is always part of the present. It is in this light that one may best understand what Rahner means when he says:

As a Christian, a man knows about his future because he knows (and so far as he knows) about himself and his redemption in Christ through God's revelation. His knowledge concerning the eschata is not a communication additional to dogmatic anthropology and Christology, but *their* transposition into the grammatical mood of completion (IV, 415 [335]).

It is the participative, social nature of eschatology, together with the future's mysterious and indeterminate freedom, that makes so-called apocalyptic meteorological assertions about the future of creation false. Such false assertions deny the subject's own roles and responsibilities in the production of the worldly future and thus "de-eschatologise" him, and make of him "a being who in his *present* is not concerned with the future, because the future is only this distantly outstanding object" (IV, 408 [328-9]). By contrast

biblical eschatology must always be read as a statement *coming from* the revealed present and *going towards* the real future; not as a statement coming from an anticipated future going to the present. To assert (*Aus-sage*) from the present into the future is eschatology; to insert (*Ein-sage*) from the future into the present is apocalyptic... The eschatological statement belongs to man's nature and, when it deals with the present as revealed by the word of God, is Christian eschatology. The apocalyptic in-sertion is either fantasy or gnosticism... (IV, 418-9 [337]).⁶

This distinction between the existential futurity of the present and the future merely understood as the linear continuation of the present sets the stage for Rahner's engagement with what he understands as the predominant forms of secular orientations to the future.

The expectation of the future voiced by those Rahner calls "Marxists" is "a future which is possible, really internal to the world, foreseeable, which is categorially describable and which can be planned" (VI, 77 [59]). Although Rahner does not routinely use the term, this might be named the "determinate future," and it can be compared with the "absolute future," an expression found in all of Rahner's essays on the future, and which means a future which transcends every "worldly and categorisable future." The word "absolute" refers in this context to that which is unconditioned. By definition the absolute future is finally unreconcilable with

the determinate future, because the latter refers to that which is bounded, conditioned and particular. What makes Rahner's account of the absolute future interesting, however, are the specific ways in which it is not wholly assimilable to a philosophical framework based on Kant, who was the first philosopher to use words like "absolute" routinely.

For Kant the idea of that which is unconditioned or absolute arises from reason's abstraction from all particular conditioning, in particular the limitations of space and time.⁷ We come to apprehend objects because of their boundedness in space and time, and come to acquire an abstract notion of space and time and can entertain – if only formally – the notion of something that is not bounded in this way, even though such absoluteness cannot in principle be experienced as a thing. Kant moves from here to a view that the idea of the unconditioned functions for reason as the totality of conditions and thus in some sense the rational "ground" of the conditioned. The kind of language used by Rahner, by contrast, is of a different kind.⁸

Christianity ... understands itself, and can be understood, from the future which it knows as absolute, coming towards humans and humankind... the absolute future is the true and real future of man; it is real possibility for him, an offer which is coming towards him (VI, 78-9 [60-1]).

Whereas, for Kant, an absolute notion is a product of reason, and therefore functions merely as a regulative standard (it must be postulated but it has no intentionality of its own), Rahner insists that the absolute future has its own peculiar kind of personal agency and is that with which human beings can establish some kind of relationship:

The true future, the last thing which is itself un-makable by us, happens quite simply; it comes towards us. ... We are those who experience its lightning in the hope that our experience of darkness may turn out to be a consequence of the future's dazzling brightness, and that it might not kill us but save us eternally (VIII, 560 [X, 240]).

This constitutive element of human understanding of the world is not only the "condition of the possibility of a categorised worldly planning" but is itself the creator of all futures: "Christianity is the religion of the *absolute future*" (VI, 79 [61]). In a particularly bold statement Rahner says

Absolute future is only another name for what is really meant by "God" ... God, as absolute future, is fundamentally and necessarily the unsayable mystery... (VI, 80-81 [62])⁹

Rahner is careful not to suggest that the absolute future defines or exhausts what is meant by "God" and this relates to the fact that the term "absolute future" is itself not exhaustively definable. "God" and "absolute future" do, however, refer to each other. The reasons for positing this identification are not explicitly given but there are at least two plausible possibilities. Firstly, it is important to escape from the Kantian regulative

framework which would reduce the absolute future to the rationally reconstructed pool of possibilities for all determinate futures. This would exercise no binding claim on human judgements because right from the outset it is divorced (abstracted) from any particular form of life.¹⁰ Secondly, by identifying the absolute future with God, the stakes are raised in any encounter with what Rahner calls "Marxist Utopia": any determinate future cannot be made a final goal, in Rahner's scheme, without explicitly committing an act of idolatry. Rahner rejects both purely rational theology (where God is no more than an idea of reason) and the kind of pantheism where God is identified with, and known as, the substance of the world.

Having asserted unambiguously that no determinate instance of planning can be considered final, and having claimed that Christian worship is oriented to God's completion of creation, Rahner is clear that the rejection of "utopian ideology" – which posits "a determinate, single reality of the pluralistic world of experience as an absolute, fixed point" – does *not* mean that one is uninterested in the future in an everyday sense: the tomorrows of next week and next year. On the contrary: we are confronted with political tasks and responsibilities.

Christianity is not merely neutral with respect to sensible planning of the kind of future that is internal to the world but adopts a *positive* orientation to it. It treats this rational, actively planned construction of the worldly future ... as a task given with the divinely willed being (*Wesen*) of humanity (VI, 83 [64]).

This is an important comment about the limits of theological appeals to truth. Whilst Christian theological claims, at their most fundamental level (such as in creeds and doctrines), must remain appropriately agnostic about "the material *content* of this future" – that is, our concrete tomorrows – nevertheless, Christian practices of worship make a fully engaged practical orientation not merely unavoidable but positively demanded. As a mere theologian, Rahner knows he has no special authority to make infallible pronouncements about the concrete future required of us by God; nevertheless as a responsible Christian he must exercise good judgement about which instances of concrete planning and practice are most appropriate to a Christian understanding of graced human subjectivity. Before considering this question further, it will be helpful to gain a clearer idea of Rahner's relationship to Heidegger's philosophy.

Originary Temporality

The explicit philosophical influences on Rahner's theology are well known.¹¹ Detailed evaluation of such influences, however, is made difficult by the fact that Rahner's own reading habits are not known in detail, and some of his most important writings do not offer substantial apparatus that might guide the reader to his sources. Nevertheless, it is illuminating to compare Rahner's position with Heidegger's classical statements in *Being and Time*. In order to take up a perspective on Rahner's appropriation of Heidegger it is necessary to have a relatively clear view of Heidegger's

own contribution to philosophical understandings of the future. Concerning Heidegger's pragmatic or non-pragmatic view of time, opinion is divided¹² The part of Heidegger's early work which bears most directly upon Rahner's eschatological categories is division two section III of *Being and Time*, on the temporality of *Dasein*, and in particular the authentic forms that this temporality can and should take. The other major text which provides useful orientation is *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, written in 1927, but as this was only published in 1975, it did not directly influence the writings by Rahner under consideration here. The key terms relevant to this discussion are temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) and the advancing future (*Zukunft*).

For Heidegger, in conscious opposition to Kant, temporality is not merely a condition for the subject's constitution of objects but is itself a condition for understanding that kind of subjectivity itself;¹³ it is the "horizon from which we understand being."¹⁴ Temporality and its role as an intrinsic aspect of *Dasein* is most clearly brought into focus in Heidegger's discussion of death and the future. Briefly, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is rightly understood as being which orients itself to its own dying in such a way as to do justice to its finiteness. This kind of orientation Heidegger names "resoluteness." "Authentic" *Dasein* (the kind of being to which one should aspire) thus manifests – and is – a resoluteness in its anticipation of death (SZ 302 [349-50]).¹⁵ Crucial to this kind of statement is an acknowledgment that death is not simply a future event that occurs at the end of life but is something whose importance is constantly part of present life.

Anticipation brings *Dasein* face to face with a possibility which is constantly certain but which at any moment remains indefinite as to when that possibility will become an impossibility (SZ 308 [356]).

What *Dasein* has the capacity to be – its "ownmost possibility" – must entail a confrontation with its own ending, with its own final impossibility in order that it may correctly understand its own provisionality. Only *Dasein* that has grasped its own contingency can avoid deluding itself and can thus act with a resoluteness that is not a form of escape or a make-believe "overcoming of death" (SZ 310 [357]). *Dasein* should thus have a particular orientation to the future which accepts that its end is coming and that an appropriate kind of living must integrate this fully into its self-understanding. *Dasein* which has such a self-understanding can then orient itself practically towards its own positive possibility.

Anticipatory resoluteness, when taken formally and existentially ... is *being towards* one's ownmost distinctive potentiality-for-being. This sort of thing is possible only in that *Dasein* can, indeed, come towards itself in its ownmost possibility, and that it can put up with this possibility as a possibility in thus letting itself come towards itself – in other words, that it exists. This letting-itself-come-towards-itself is that distinctive possibility which it puts up with, is the primordial phenomenon of the *future as coming towards* (*Zukunft*) (SZ 325 [372]).

There is, in other words, a dimension to *Dasein* that is "possibility": its "what it can be" has not yet been realised, but this "what" nevertheless shapes what *Dasein* is at any current moment. *Dasein*'s integral future (to be distinguished from events in its life that are merely yet to occur) is something that is experienced as an advent of its own possibilities to which *Dasein* responds (or fails to respond) in an appropriate fashion.

By the term "futural" (*zukünftiges*), we do not here have in view a "now" which has *not yet* become "actual" and which some time *will be* for the first time. We have in view the coming (*Kunft*) in which *Dasein*, in its ownmost potentiality-for-being, comes towards itself. Anticipation makes *Dasein* *authentically* futural, and in such a way that the anticipation itself is possible only in so far as *Dasein*, *as being*, is always coming towards itself – that is to say, in so far as it is futural in its being in general (SZ 326 [373]).

The insistent usage of the present tense to characterise *Dasein*'s futurity is a central feature of Heidegger's strategy to confound a purely linear view of time. In his discussion of temporality Heidegger says quite plainly "we must hold ourselves aloof from all those significations of 'future,' 'past,' and 'present' which thrust themselves upon us from the ordinary conception of time" (SZ 326 [374]). The kind of futurity that in some way gives rise to the present is a "primordial," deeper kind of futurity: "we do not have in mind 'in advance of something' [das 'Vorher'] in the sense of 'not yet now – but later'" because this would just turn *Dasein* into the kind of object that is simply observed rather than a being which can understand itself and anticipate its own comprehended possibilities. Heidegger's means for evoking this kind of active participation in – and bringing-about – of *Dasein*'s own future entails a redescription of the kind of temporality that characterises our subjectivity. He goes so far as to make extreme statements, such as "*The primary meaning of existentiality is the future*" and "*The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future*" (SZ 327; 329 [376; 378], his emphasis). Hence, although there may well be a sequence of events which would appear to an observer to make up a history of a particular *Dasein*, the latter cannot treat events merely as a spectator but must (or risk inauthenticity) adopt a more synoptic approach where both past and future are said to form each present.¹⁶ With Olafson, "...what Heidegger wants to assert becomes clear in his analysis of the 'moment' (*Augenblick*) as the configuration of temporality in which the active character of *Dasein* is not obscured by a false assimilation to world-time. In the moment, *Dasein* does not *await* the future, but projects it as that which it has chosen and is acting to bring about."¹⁷ Future, past and present can be said to form an "original unity" which makes *Dasein* possible, and from which *Dasein* takes up its practical responsibilities.¹⁸

With this kind of picture in view it is possible to see why Heidegger claims, at the beginning of *Being and Time*, that temporality is so important as to be "the meaning of" *Dasein*. If this transformed understanding of temporality, particularly the future, is convincing then it is important to understand what status this *Zu-kunft* has vis à vis the kind of future which *does*

refer to events yet-to-come. If *Dasein* is engaged in anticipating its own possibilities, then this will certainly produce concrete events and particular acts which very much participate in some linear temporal causative succession. If "the present is just a particular aspect of the act in which *Dasein* acts toward a possible future for itself,"¹⁹ that is, if it is part of an original unity with a practical movement towards particular possibilities, then one must ask about the ways in which "futurity" is related to possible futures. How is the existential category "anticipation" manifested in ordinary acts? Even more simply: is *Dasein's* "possibility" to be seen as a goal to be realised?

This question can be most clearly set out by considering a debate between two views of Heidegger. The first is most clearly exemplified by Mark Okrent. In Okrent's pragmatic interpretation of Heidegger, "possibility" is something made up of things which can in principle be finished. Temporality is "the structure of *Dasein's* purposive social activity" towards a future goal, and *Dasein* is itself an acting towards a social end; its acting is "aware of that end as to be accomplished."²⁰ On this model "possible future" is explicitly equated with what is "to be accomplished." This is supported by noting Heidegger's borrowing from Husserl of the concept of "horizon" – temporality is the horizon from which we understand being – as laid out in the *Cartesian Meditations*: the horizons of every subjective process are "predelineated potentialities," and the latter

are not empty possibilities, but rather possibilities intentionally predelineated in respect of content ... and in addition, having the character of possibilities actualizable by the *Ich*.²¹

A horizon is not just the necessary condition for any understanding of being but also refers to possibilities that can be *finished* by an act or a series of acts. In drawing out the implications of this kind of understanding of horizon, Okrent suggests that there is a "horizon par excellence" or "ultimate horizon" in our consciousness of internal time, and every actual intentional act is placed within this unlimited context. Intentionality is thus the situating of an object within a structured horizon which is shaped socially by what is handed down and what is anticipated: a "concretely delimited horizon, which is necessary if we are to understand anything that is as something that is."²²

There is a problem with this, however. In speaking of an "ultimate horizon" in which particular realisable possibilities are placed it becomes extremely complicated to say how such a horizon of all horizons relates to concretely possible events, other than simply asserting that it is their "condition." Heidegger himself, by contrast, seems to say that temporality is not only the field within which events take place but is itself an active contributor whose agency derives from *Dasein's* response to its perceived possibilities. Olafson suggests that there is a question here about the "wholeness" of *Dasein*, the degree to which it can finish its tasks: "This question arises out of the account of transcendence as the movement of *Dasein* toward its possibilities, its always being 'out ahead of itself' (*Sich-vor-weg-sein*) in such a way that at every moment of its life there is something unresolved and incomplete about it."²³ On this view, *Dasein's* "possibility" is

never completed until it is finished by death, and concrete realisable possibilities materialise against an ever-receding background of other possibilities. The completion of *Dasein* is thus something not available (or “present-at-hand”) to be inspected or known in advance. It can nevertheless be comprehended in some less-than-fully-concrete way:

To be sure, I cannot grasp just *what* my complete identity will be. But I nevertheless know, even from within my own standpoint, *how* to view my life as something I have the potential to realize.²⁴

It is this kind of “how” of *Dasein*’s orientation to its ending that “anticipation” describes, for Heidegger. The “how” of its outlook can embrace, in principle, an unlimited number of possible “whats” (concrete realisations of particular possibilities), and this may be a helpful way of understanding the relationship between *Dasein*’s “ownmost possibility” and its realisable goals – no particular one of which can be equated with that existential possibility itself. “Possibility” as an existential category is perhaps best understood precisely as the “how” that fundamentally shapes each finite act ventured by *Dasein*. It follows from this that giving concrete content (a “what”) to the orientational “how” will always be a matter of judgement which, with varied success, does justice to *Dasein*’s perceived possibility; which is more or less “authentic” in Heidegger’s terms. For Heidegger, the desired “how” is an attitude of resolute anticipation of *Dasein*’s ownmost possibility in the face of death in every decisive “moment.” Death, which completes *Dasein*, is itself a possibility that can materialise at any moment: it is a “constant threat” (SZ 265 [310]) to which there corresponds a demand that *Dasein* live up to its wholeness and authenticity (SZ 269 [314]). The practical “how” which results from *Dasein*’s understanding of its possibility is thus a response to an address. Heidegger does not spell out in any simple fashion how he can know what such an address demands, but it is at least clear that he believes *Dasein* experiences its possibility as that which exercises a claim or a call. Authenticity is thus, for Heidegger, unquestionably binding for *Dasein*, although presumably the specific forms which such a claim might take are subject to the interpretive judgement of *Dasein* – something that seems to be overlooked in some of Heidegger’s more positive assertions, where distinctly questionable forms of content are marshalled to fill the formal space of “authenticity” or “possibility.”²⁵

If, in Heidegger’s wider scheme, understanding an object is competence in deploying it in accordance with its appropriate role in some context (e.g. understanding a hammer is competence to use it as a hammer) then the self-understanding of *Dasein* is, accordingly, competence with oneself. That is, self-understanding entails deploying oneself in accordance with one’s appropriate role. For Heidegger, the future of originary temporality is what William Blattner calls “the sense of” this self-competence.²⁶ Given the equation of “future” with “ownmost possibility” it seems proper to consider the latter as a “sense of” something. *Dasein*’s “ownmost possibility” is its sense of its roles and responsibilities in its particular context. If this is placed next to an understanding that the only completion of *Dasein* is death, then it makes less sense to think of “possibility” as *Dasein*’s striving to realise its

ends than to think of it as a more formally existential orientation.

The second view of Heidegger is best seen in Blattner's interpretation. Blattner proposes a detailed reading of Heidegger's following statements: "The future is *not later* than been-ness" (SZ 350, Blattner's translation) and

"Future" does not here mean a Now, which *not yet* having become "actual," sometime *will be*, but rather the coming, in which *Dasein* comes towards itself in its ownmost ability-to-be (SZ 325, Blattner's translation).

Blattner objects to the pragmatic readings of Olafson and Okrent on the grounds that they rely too heavily on a notion of *Dasein's* self-competence as an ability to realise – that is, complete – its own possibilities; in Okrent's words *Dasein's* social role is something "to be accomplished." Blattner notes that for this to be true, the "future" of *Dasein* must, in contradiction to the Heidegger quoted above, be "later than" been-ness.

Moreover, all talk of trying to realize my ends ... seems to imply that I can actualize or realize myself by bringing myself (or my future states) about in the future. Yet Heidegger says that this future that I am as coming towards myself is not something that could be actual.²⁷

The implication of this is drawn out so as to discourage any interpretation which moves too quickly from the formal futural "how" or "sense of" (Hoffman and Blattner respectively) to the "what" or the "realisable possibility" that *Dasein* may judge to be an appropriate goal for action. Blattner uses the example of one's orientation to a particular career as an example:

The sense of "possibility" on which Heidegger relies is not that of "possible actuality," for it can never (come to) be that I have (already) made myself a lawyer, for example. The point is not that there are conditions on being a lawyer that no one can ever satisfy... The point is rather that adopting a role (casting oneself in it) is not attempting to bring about some possible, future state of myself. Casting myself as a lawyer does not terminate in accomplishment or failure, because it does not terminate.²⁸

In order to be a lawyer, therefore, one needs to do something rather deeper than simply pass law exams and take up a practice. "Casting oneself in a role" is not something achieved and inserted on a curriculum vitae but something continually ongoing. Roles, in Blattner's sense, are thus quite different from physical features such as height or hair colour. A hammer's being "for hammering" is different from its being made of wood, and being "for hammering" is its future, so to speak. The fact that a hammer has been used for hammering does not "complete" its being "for hammering," although it is an appropriate use, given its assigned role. *Dasein* differs from a hammer in so far as it *understands* its being for a role, and thus takes up an active futural orientation. It is because of this that Blattner makes the initially odd-sounding claim that *Dasein's* possibility is

not something that it can have achieved (which makes it sound distinctly impossible). *Dasein's* possibility is achieved in *being* that possibility, never in *having been* it. This kind of convergence of past, future and present makes better sense of the "original unity" that Heidegger ascribes to them. Thus one can say that taking a role is an understanding of one's future, a future that is only completed in death:

There is a sense of potency, ability, of "not yet," that characterizes *Dasein*, but that cannot be cashed out by saying that *Dasein* can or is able to become, or that *Dasein* is not yet, but will be later. Thus Heidegger says, "The 'ahead' ['*Vor*'] does not mean the 'in advance' ['*Vorher*'] in the sense of the 'Not-yet-now – but later' ['*Noch-nicht-jetzt – aber später*']".²⁹

It is important not to underemphasise that the "present" of such a practical self-understanding does not denigrate concrete goals (the goals appropriate to being a lawyer, for example) but at the same time the meaning of the future of originary temporality is not best interpreted as being primarily concerned with bringing about such goals. Particular goals are inseparable from roles, but futurity and "ownmost possibility" refer first and foremost to the roles themselves: the "how" and the "sense of" *Dasein's* practical orientations to its future. With this in mind one can read Rahner's eschatological notions with a better sense of their relationship to Heidegger's description of *Dasein's* temporality.

Rahner after Heidegger

Given the clear ways in which Heidegger's understanding of time bears upon the earlier discussion of Rahner's "absolute future," it will not be necessary to rehearse in detail how his various borrowings can be traced back to their Heideggerian sources.³⁰ Two characteristic examples of Rahner's whole approach clearly demonstrate how thoroughly he has assimilated much of the foregoing:

if the present of man's *Dasein* is what is referred to the future, the latter, remaining the future as such, is not merely something articulated in advance but is an inner moment of man and of his actual present in his being... (IV, 411 [331]).

A human being (and humanity) is the reality which knowingly and willingly is always before itself, which constitutes itself by devising its future, or better by devising itself (i.e. its being) towards *that future* (VI, 79 [61]).

There are many other such overtly Heideggerian passages in Rahner's work, such as those in which he speaks of the future as something one "lays hold of" or as an "inner moment of human existence." Of rather greater interest are the ways in which Rahner diverges from Heidegger and incorporates other perspectives into his notion of eschatology. Importantly, while the concept of the futurity of humanity derives from

Heidegger, the idea of the "absolute future" was developed in dialogue with Marxists who (in Rahner's view) placed too great an emphasis on achievable planned events serially "in the future."³¹ Unlike Heidegger, whose articulation of *Dasein's* "resoluteness" seeks to evade the temporal series almost completely, Rahner's own response attempts to do more explicit justice both to an existential futurity (a Christian participation in redemption) and to show that this must include all political planning (which without doubt needs a very firm grasp of "ordinary time") which affirms responsible action in the public sphere but refuses to allow any particular goal to claim to have achieved any final completion. Thus, where (at least in Blattner's interpretation) the Heidegger of part II of *Being and Time* is more interested in roles than in concrete possibilities, Rahner seems to want to keep these two themes together, so that Christian self-understanding is inseparable from serious questions of political planning (VI, 82 [64]; VIII, 556 [X, 236]; IX, 529 [XII, 191]).³² It may also be significant that where Heidegger speaks of *Dasein*, Rahner talks of *Mensch*, thus shifting a model of the significant sphere of subjectivity (the "who" in acts of thinking, speaking and doing) towards a more obviously social agent. *Dasein* certainly understands itself in a social situation in Heidegger's work – indeed, *Dasein* is remarkable for just such a social network of roles – but the major existential decisions, calls of conscience and confrontations with death seem largely to be directed at the individual. *Dasein* does not seem, in *Being and Time*, to have a plural reference in as strong a way as "humanity" or "we Marxists" does. To the extent that Rahner's eschatology embraces a more collective self-understanding, his thinking is better suited than Heidegger's to considering directly political questions that require the co-ordination of different bodies in the discharging of shared tasks.³³

The one quite distinctive characteristic of Rahner's eschatology that constitutes an important contribution to speech about the future is the insistence that the future is utter *mystery* (IV, 408ff. [329ff.]; VI, 80ff. [62ff.]; VIII, 555ff. [X, 235ff.]; IX, 526 [XII, 188ff.]).³⁴ The theologian's task is not to unveil that mystery through some privileged futurological or quasi-meteorological activity but rather to articulate the ways in which humans might rightly respond to it in particular times and places:

...it must obviously be said that humans can and must plan the future, project and draft it in advance and manipulate it ... But this does not change the fact that even the question of the worldly future, fundamentally, cannot ever be adequately answered (IX, 529 [XII, 191-2]).

There is, for Rahner, no way of evading the mystery of the future. In part, this is important in order to give due weight to issues of freedom:

If there is any real freedom... then there is an open and dark worldly future which illuminates itself fundamentally for the historical subject in the act in which it is posited and so is made present (IX, 535 [XII, 197]).

This is a relatively simple point which denies any kind of historical determinism, the so-called Hegelian legacy in Marxist historical materialism which is over-confident about its predictions. At the same time Rahner draws attention to the contingency of all human action:

The future is not evolutionary, not planned, not at our disposal... The future silently lies in wait and springs out at us, tears up the nets of our plans, spoils the kind of "future" which we ourselves have planned... (VIII, 556 [X, 237]).

This is not merely a banal reminder about the vulnerability of the best laid plans. Rahner here links the mystery of the future – which at one level refers to its unpredictability – to the *claim* that it makes, to the fact that futurity is part of what human being entails, and that an attitude to the future partly constitutes who we are. In other words, an inner constitutive aspect of being human is itself underdetermined and in principle unknowable. Every act of particular goal-oriented calculation must incorporate the absolutely incalculable: or risk being blind to issues that make any kind of practice *meaningful*:

before the future alone can we pose the questions we answer to ourselves; as the empowering of our free power – which can only bring about determinate things in the realm of what it has not itself brought about – it already stands open, and we can begin with it (VIII, 557 [X, 238]).

Rahner is here attempting to articulate the wider context within which particular goals – the "worldly future" – are situated. However clearly a particular course of action may be perceived by the actors who plan to bring about a determinate conclusion, this itself rests on a deeper ecology of conditions over which they do not exercise any control, and finally on what is unconditioned, on what is in principle uncontrollable.³⁵ At this point one can summarise Rahner's principal contributions to discourse about the future.

The "future" is, for Rahner, fundamentally formal: its concrete determinations cannot be specified in advance, either by forms of gnosis or via determinist schemes of the type that occur in some (unspecified) "Marxist" writings. The future is an "inner" constitutive aspect of human self-understanding which addresses humanity as a collective body and imposes itself as an unfinishable task. It is thus up to the judgement of individuals and groups rightly to interpret this task in such a way as to produce manageable and realisable tasks (the "worldly future") in the public sphere. The absolute future is inescapably incomprehensible – there is an absolute, blinding excess of it – but it nevertheless imposes itself as a question to every particular human action which should, Rahner claims, constitute some kind of contingent response to that question:

Where Christianity is, at one and the same time, a real will towards the world and a Yes towards the absolute future – in a relationship of

mutual conditioning – it creatively brings forth something utopian which criticises the present and continues to push towards a new historical future (IX, 537 [XII, 199]).

This brief half-acknowledgement of Ernst Bloch indicates that the formality of the future is made effective in concrete acts through the mediation of acts of political judgement. The relationship between form and content – a relationship which, according to Rahner, is unavoidably “fluid” (IV, 425 [345]) – is arrested in particular times and places so as to produce such critical apparatus as “standards” and “ideals” – which belong to the realm of the “utopian” (IX, 537 [XII, 198]) – and yet which are always provisional and dependent on the “absolute future.”

Questions

There are, however, important questions surrounding Rahner’s use of the word “absolute.” If acts of judgement arise from a “mutually conditioning relationship ... between man’s relation to his worldly future and his attitude towards his absolute future” (IX, 536-7 [XII, 198]) then it clearly matters how this absolute future is characterised. Put simply, if the absolute future is *only* mysterious – something excessive, unintelligible – then it cannot condition anything in any *particular* way, just as a *merely* determinate future contains no internal criteria for deciding how to change itself: there is no *meaningful* way of judging whether one act is better than another. There are many possible ways to address this state of affairs. One is to make a fundamental claim about the world so as to give it an internal criterion (a strategy employed by Ernst Bloch in his *The Principle of Hope*, for example); another is to make a claim about the unconditioned (for Rahner, the “absolute future”) by connecting it to God.³⁶ “God,” of course, however mysterious, is understood by Rahner, as a Christian, in a *particular* way and, for him, speech about God has the capacity both to inspire and discipline the imagination. In order to give some content to the ruthlessly formal structure of the “absolute future” – in order for it to be at all meaningful – Rahner insists that the theologian’s ignorance of future events (a quite normal human ignorance) is an advantage because her task is precisely to remind others that this ignorance is inescapable (IX, 519 [XII, 181]). Having done this, the real question must centre upon the orientation which one takes up towards this unknown future; Rahner is quite clear that, because one cannot fruitfully enquire into the content of the future, one’s ignorance needs to become *docta ignorantia* – an ignorance that is educated in some way.³⁷ As a Christian theologian, Rahner associates this education with revelation:

Christian faith ... confesses that this absolute future of the world is not only offered as merely open possibility, but is infallibly and victoriously confirmed in Jesus Christ (IX, 520 [XII, 182]).

In other words, the content of the formal entity “absolute future” is not given internally: any uneducated encounter with it is experienced as a

threatening mystery which rejects all attempts to comprehend it. This much is shared with Heidegger who affirms that however much *Dasein* may come to understand itself, *Sein* remains threateningly unknowable. Both Rahner and Heidegger seem to be in agreement about the extent to which philosophy can provide answers at the level of being itself. Unlike Heidegger, however, Rahner does not make death the decisive event for human life. He controls, and to a certain extent abolishes, this agnosticism through Christology. In so doing, by understanding being, or the absolute future, in a particular way, Rahner is no longer engaged in a narrowly philosophical pursuit, not even a speculative one. When Rahner states confidently that the future is where one looks, in hopeful expectation, "for the love of God and of man" he is no longer engaged in the same type or level of discourse as that which conducts an analysis of the futural dimension of human self-understanding. The latter is a form of phenomenology, an exposition of what is in principle accessible, allegedly, to any enquirer who chooses to ask questions about how humans can be understood to have an orientation to the future. The following assertion is clearly of a different kind:

the *absolute future* is God himself, or rather the deed of his absolute self-communication, accomplished by himself alone (IX, 523 [XII, 185]).

No degree of phenomenological analysis could yield this kind of statement: it is a claim whose force derives from a context and a language in which the reader must already have learned to participate. In sum: Rahner's theology "includes" philosophical analysis, rather than being derived from it.

It is important to note that any particular characterisation of the absolute future is not just a "standard" by which the outcome is measured – because it has no concrete content that would be commensurate with the decision in question. Rather, as with Heidegger's portrait of futurity, its character is a constitutive part of the self-understandings of the participants in discussion, and shapes their aspirations, although it cannot determine them in any direct way, again because it is formal. What it certainly is *not* is an idealised determinate future which all real futures try to establish as nearly as possible. The redemption of creation (to take one example) is not something of which one can have a concrete blueprint, and which one can then attempt to approximate in individual instances. It is not attainable as a determinate future and, more importantly perhaps, is not even partially or "more or less" attainable as a determinate future. A better approach is to say that a determinate future is, to a greater or lesser degree, consonant with the demands made by the absolute future, and judgements made in the light of it may be more or less sound. By contrast, the absolute future itself is unconditioned and makes a claim which cannot be finally captured by any particular image, although particular images (which themselves can only arise through acts of judgement) certainly indicate the nature of its claim in a particular circumstance. Particular human decisions should not anticipate achieving the absolute future, and particular human ideas about what the absolute future would be like should not

claim final validity. Nevertheless, it is reasonably clear that an orientation to the absolute future is possible so long as it has particular formal qualities and not others. These formal qualities are to be understood as given, by and large, in the structures of a community's particular self-understandings, practices and language. While they can be abbreviated and made the object of debate they are nevertheless best understood as something received, or already part of the social world, rather than consciously produced. The absolute future thus derives part of its authority through speech about it being handed down, which thus implies that it is inherently bound up with tradition.

This interpretation of Rahner is not unassailable, by any means. Whilst I think that an emphasis of the "already" operative nature of theological pre-suppositions to the absolute future (already operative in a particular language and form of practice) does best justice to Rahner's differences from Heidegger, it would not be implausible to argue (as Fergus Kerr has) that Rahner tries to ground his fundamental claims by developing an apologetic epistemology.³⁸ Whichever of these positions one adopts, it is true that Rahner is unclear about what he takes to be the degree to which human knowledge of God seems to be culturally contingent. Rahner's belief that all human knowledge and judgement is "universally" conditioned by God's grace needs to be matched by an acknowledgement that there is no internal validation of such a belief, and that it seems impossible to imagine the limits of such conditioning. To say that all human action is a participation in God's creative love, as Rahner does, is to reveal and articulate an ontology whose scope and validity is already taken for granted, which cannot be externally validated or judged. With this in mind, it is perhaps trivially true to say that Rahner's connection of absolute future with God is a consequence of such an imaginative Christian worldview and cannot be demonstrated independently. Such a suggestion is, at any rate, probably the only one that will enable a fruitful ongoing engagement with Rahner's eschatology.

This discussion began with a promise to explore how technically formal theological issues bear upon concrete political practice. This turns out to be remarkably simple. Eschatology does not provide Christians with the concrete content of their political projects but makes explicit who they take themselves to be and reveals their future, to which they are already, as Christians, committed. Adapting Heidegger, Rahner asserts that eschatology is a way of speaking that makes explicit the assumptions and roles implicit in casting oneself as a Christian. For Rahner, Christians understand their roles and responsibilities to be a consequence of their participation in God's own life. Political judgements have to be made (Rahner's "*innerweltlich*" domain) in the light of this understanding, which is the context of the absolute future. For Rahner, eschatology is the kind of speech which explores the nature of the absolute future, which is itself our own "given" inner self-understanding which we experience as our "futurity." Eschatology provides the intellectual and imaginative resources with which responsible Christians make judgements in those public spheres of politics which concern themselves with the future, above all in political planning. "Marxism" serves for Rahner as an umbrella for any kind of

political planning which makes any specific concrete goal into something "absolute." By contrast with such approaches, Christian eschatology, and thus Christian political practice, always places its particular plans and goals within the context of an excessive, absolute future which both makes possible and judges any particular futures we may try to bring about. In brief, God is not a human project, and neither is God's future. What God's future entails for us, and demands from us, is responsible judgement and decision-making, for which eschatology provides both resources and hope.

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NOTES

1. The dialogue between Marxists and Christian Theologians in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, in the *Paulusgesellschaft*, seems to have sharpened a number of questions for Rahner and such colleagues as Metz and Moltmann. It soon becomes obvious that Rahner's characterisations of putatively "Marxist" positions are not wholly fair or accurate: it is likely that Rahner acquired his views from conversation rather than from serious study of Marx or Marx's followers. Rahner's references to "Marxist Utopia" and similar concepts seem largely to have been a foil against which Rahner could develop his own distinctions, rather than serious commentary on Marxism.

2. See Martin Heidegger 'Phenomenology and Theology' in *The Piety of Thinking* (tr. J.G. Hart and J.C. Maraldo), (London: Indiana University Press, 1976), 5-21.

3. On the levelling of "time" see Amos Funkenstein *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 89-97; Funkenstein speaks of the homogenisation of space and time which Newton needed for his view of forces, namely that they can "act everywhere in the same manner" (ibid., 91). This kind of treatment of time may be well suited to equations of motion, for example, but its transposition into the understanding of history is wholly inappropriate. On the connection between the hegemony of rectilinear time with the changes in how one speaks of God see Michael Buckley *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, (London: Yale University Press, 1987), 95ff.; on absolute time see 114ff. For general issues see also Wolfhart Pannenberg *Systematic Theology Volume 2* (tr. G.W. Bromiley), (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 151-2. Manfred Frank gives a detailed account of the ways in which non-Newtonian "time" language was used by the early Romantics in discussions of subjectivity. (These may be significant precursors of Heidegger's approach, to be considered shortly.) For a representative treatment – of Novalis – see Manfred Frank *Das Problem »Zeit« in der deutschen Romantik: Zeitbewußtsein und Bewußtsein von Zeitlichkeit in der frühromantischen Philosophie und in Tiecks Dichtung*, (Munich: Schöningh, 1990), 216ff.

4. For another (but similar) account of the relationship between apocalyptic and eschatology see Christopher Rowland *The Open Heaven*, (London: SPCK, 1982), esp. 26-28. All references to Rahner in roman numerals refer to volumes of Karl Rahner *Schriften Zur Theologie*, (Köln: Benziger, published between 1962 and 1972), followed, for convenience, by a reference to the English translation (published as Karl Rahner *Theological Investigations*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd). All translations are my own, and I have attempted to translate the German in such a way as to bring out the proximity of Rahner's vocabulary to that of Heidegger, as well as to tidy up (where

appropriate) some of the potentially misleading or confusing aspects of the published translation.

5. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (tr. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong), (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983), 20.

6. Rahner is obviously handling these terms in a fashion that is not identical to Rowland's usage. In Rowland's terms, what Rahner is arguing against is the identification of apocalyptic that includes eschatological elements with the kind of eschatology with which doctrine has to do, and which speaks of present realities in a futurist "mood."

7. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (tr. Kemp Smith), (Macmillan: London, 1929), A321ff / B378ff.

8. Rahner, of course, *does* speak of God as "ground" at many points of his work, but this is best read as a statement about our dependence upon God. For the purposes of this section, it need merely be noted that Rahner emphasises a kind of active relationship between humans and the one who makes, and is, our "future."

9. This need not be read as a proof of God, but might rather be a statement of the same kind as Aquinas' "quod omnes dicunt..." in the "five ways," which says something about how the word "God" should be used.

10. This claim is to be distinguished from the assertion that it is divorced from any particular circumstance, which would be a truism because *all* formal statements are abstractions in this sense. The term "particular form of life" here refers to the whole economy of thought, word and deed that characterises any community.

11. See Anne Carr *The Theological Method of Karl Rahner*, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977, Lambert Gruber *Transzendentalphilosophie und Theologie bei Johann Gottlieb Fichte und Karl Rahner*, (Frankfurt: P Lang, 1978), Karl-Heinz Weger *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to his Theology*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), James Bacik *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy According to Karl Rahner*, (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), Karl Neumann *Der Praxisbezug der Theologie bei Karl Rahner*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), Jack Bonsor *Rahner, Heidegger, and Truth*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), Thomas Sheehan *Karl Rahner The Philosophical Foundations*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987). Most point to Rahner's Thomist early work and his assimilation of Kant, Rousselot, Maréchal and Heidegger in extending Aquinas' reading of Aristotle. The most extensive treatments of these influences are Carr *op. cit.*, 18-35 and Sheehan *op. cit.*, *passim*, which undertakes a reading of Heidegger against Rahner. Bacik notes that most studies of Rahner seem to begin with specifically *philosophical* tributaries and suggests that one should be aware of what he calls "spiritual influences" in Rahner's early formative reading, in particular Origen and Bonaventure: Bacik *op. cit.*, 48. Gruber's study attempts an explicitly philosophical analysis and uses Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* to measure Rahner's location within the history of post-Kantian philosophy: Gruber *op. cit.*, 271ff. Sheehan makes this comparison one step more complex by noting how Maréchal's extensive studies of Fichte shaped his systematisation of Rousselot's work: Sheehan *op. cit.*, 55-56.

12. In the English-language literature, Frederick Olafson *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind*, (London: Yale University Press, 1987) and Mark Okrent *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 191-204 both argue broadly for an understanding of Heidegger's "originary temporality" as pragmatic (to do with the possible future states of *Dasein*); William Blattner "Existential Temporality in *Being and Time*," in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 99-129 argues in detail

that such temporality is rather more existential than pragmatic.

13. On Heidegger's relationship to Kant in this connection see Charles Sherover *Heidegger, Kant and Time*, (London: Indiana University Press 1971), 201. Sherover suggests that Heidegger's sources for such an understanding of time are primarily Augustine's Confessions XI, 26 and Plotinus's Enneads: *ibid.*, 211.

14. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (tr. A Hofstadter), (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1982, 324.

15. References are to Martin Heidegger *Sein und Zeit* (seventh edition), (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953), followed, when appropriate, by a reference to the English translation by Macquarrie and Robinson: Martin Heidegger *Being and Time* (London: SCM Press, 1962). I have generally given this translation, with occasional alterations for consistency. I have modified all translations to begin "being" in lower case.

16. On the agency of *Dasein* see Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind*, 91.

17. *Ibid.*

18. See Heidegger *The Basic Problems*, 266

19. Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism*, 195

20. *Ibid.* It may be significant that Okrent does not support this interpretation with any apparatus.

21. Quoted in Okrent *Heidegger's Pragmatism*, 197-198.

22. Okrent *Heidegger's Pragmatism*, 199. Okrent notes that Heidegger differs from Husserl in seeing temporality not as something implicit in the perceptual field but as something fundamentally practical: understanding an entity is not simply a matter of perception but entails intending it in terms of its function for some end: *ibid.*, 200.

23. Olafson *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind*, 76.

24. Piotr Hoffman "Death, time, history: Division II of *Being and Time*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (ed. Charles B Guignon), (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 197.

25. For a critical discussion of Heidegger's public utterances in the 1930s see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (tr. F. Lawrence) (Cambridge: Polity 1987), 155ff.

26. Blattner "Existential Temporality," 103.

27. Blattner "Existential Temporality," 105.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Blattner "Existential Temporality," 106, quoting SZ 327.

30. Rahner's own lack of reference to Heidegger suggests, at last in part, that he does not intend to debate him directly, and his use of Heidegger's approach is not a strict adaptation or development. All that is intended here is a broadly synoptic account which describes the philosophical interests they share.

31. This point is made by George Vass *Karl Rahner: A Theologian in Search of a Philosophy*, (London: Steed and Ward 1985), 14.

32. These references are to articles that deal explicitly with the meanings of "future." For a fuller statement of Rahner's views on Christian social responsibility see VIII, 580ff. [X, 260-272].

33. This issue is in fact far more serious than this; where Heidegger tended to use *Dasein* as an individual reference in his earlier work, it tended to take on a transformed role from 1933 onwards. Habermas notes: "If he had hitherto used 'Dasein' in an unmistakable way for the existentially isolated individual on his course toward death, now he substitutes for this 'in-each-case-mine' Dasein the collective Dasein of a fatefully existing and 'in-each-case-our' people."

ple [Volk]. All the existential categories stay the same and yet with one stroke they change their very meaning – and not just the horizon of the expressive significance. The connotations they owe to their Christian origins, especially Kierkegaard, are transformed in the light of a New Paganism prevalent at that time" (Habermas *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 157). Rahner's use of the Christian "we" is more nuanced, to say the least, in that it affirms a collective identity without brutally asserting any nationalist limitation. It is thus all the more important to note that Rahner uses the category "humanity" in conversation with non-Christians precisely to promote a mutual understanding that crosses local or national interests.

34. The connection between mystery and eschatology was also made by Gabriel Marcel in his Gifford Lectures of 1949 and 1950 where "The Mystery of Being" ends with a call to face up to the "eschatological situation" in which humankind must face its futural possibility responsibly or reap the consequences. I do not know to what degree Rahner's own understanding of eschatology is influenced by Marcel.

35. I have chosen deliberately to underplay Rahner's "transcendental" approach to speech about the "condition" of human knowing and acting. This is partly because a proper discussion of this approach is far outside the set of issues addressed in this article, and partly because I am persuaded by Vass that Rahner is not attempting a *philosophical* project like those of Kant or Heidegger, and thus cannot be read in the same way: Vass *Rahner*, 19ff. Whether so-called "transcendental" approaches are appropriate to theological enquiry is a large question in its own right and cannot be considered here. The reading of Rahner given in this article is not dependent on such a method. For two thought-provoking criticisms of Rahner's transcendentalism in this context see Eberhard Jüngel *God as the Mystery of the World* (tr. D Guder), (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1983), 251 n.11; John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell 1990), 207ff.

36. There is an alternative framework which avoids this conundrum which baldly asserts that we find ourselves in the middle of contingent arrangements of "meanings" (both practical and conceptual) and that all tasks are given within such arrangements. This is, perhaps, a different approach from Rahner's, and one which avoids swerving towards dangerously foundationalist-sounding claims.

37. This stress upon education is intended to avoid commitment to a position which would be subject to Milbank's objection that Rahner's absolute future tends to become "the ineffable goal or an endless aspiration" (Milbank *Theology and Social Theory*, 223), whose content would be highly ambiguous. My own reading permits a more fundamentally "theological" approach in Milbank's sense by soft-pedalling any claims about God that might appear phenomenological. It is true, however, that Rahner makes a distinction between knowing "that" God is, and particular theological ways in which one knows God.

38. Fergus Kerr *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 10.